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PEKING TEST BLAST A SURPRISE TO U.S.

Size of Explosion and Speed
of Nuclear Development
Were Not Foreseen

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WASHINGTON, June 17 —

The Atomic Energy Commission, confirming today that Communist China had exploded a hydrogen bomb device, said the blast had an explosive force equal to several million tons of TNT.

United States officials were somewhat surprised by the Chinese test, which was viewed as further evidence of the unexpectedly rapid progress being made by Peking in developing a nuclear arsenal. While it was known to be working on the design of a thermonuclear device, the test came sooner than had been generally predicted by United States intelligence officials.

Contributing to the surprise of American officials was the absence of specific information that a nuclear test was imminent at the Chinese Test site at Lop Nor, in northwestern China, although it was known that preparations for further tests were under way.

Confirmation Comes Quickly
Within a few hours after the announcement by the Peking radio, however, the Atomic Energy Commission confirmed the test. The commission issued the following statement:

No Immediate Threat Seen

"Communist China has detonated a nuclear device at [the] Lop Nor nuclear test site. The yield was in the range of several megatons. This is the sixth Chinese nuclear test confirmed by the United States."

While the commission used only the term "nuclear device," there was no question in the minds of American officials, on the basis of the large explosive yield, that a thermonuclear test had been conducted. In answer to questions, a spokesman for the commission said, "We have

no reason to question that Communist China exploded its first thermonuclear device."

Spokesmen said the test "confirms that China had developed a thermonuclear capability."

Senior military analysts in Washington believed that the Chinese announcement of the successful test would intensify political pressure for the deployment of a missile defense system around the United States. But they felt there would not be an actual threat to American cities until the Chinese have built up a force of international ballistic missiles.

The test took place yesterday. Based on preliminary accounts and seismic measurements it appeared to have had an explosive yield of at least three megatons—the equivalent of three million tons of TNT.

A device capable of producing such an explosion would be ten times more powerful than any previously tested by the Chinese and equal to the largest warheads on United States intercontinental ballistic missiles.

A determination of the precise nature of the device and how it was exploded — on a tower or suspended from a balloon—will require a detailed analysis of the radioactive debris from the explosion. The collection of airborne debris by planes and its analysis at United States laboratories in the Far East are expected to take several days.

China Lacks Big Bombers

Among American atomic experts the general belief was that China was developing a hydrogen bomb warhead for an intercontinental ballistic missile rather than a bomb designed to be dropped from an airplane. This belief was based in part on the fact that Communist China has no long-range bombers but is known to be developing an intercontinental missile.

The presumption of American officials was that Communist China had not developed a deliverable thermonuclear warhead. They acknowledged, however, that its unexpected speed

in developing a thermonuclear device was certain to introduce serious new political and military factors into the atomic arms race.

Once again the officials emphasized, as they have after each of the five preceding tests, that Communist China, even with a hydrogen bomb, was not in a position to challenge the overwhelming nuclear power of the United States.

Treaty Complications Possible

They added, however, that, in addition to increasing pressure for the deployment of an anti-ballistic missile defense system in the United States, the Chinese test might complicate negotiations for a treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. From the United States standpoint, the test emphasized the urgency of reaching agreement on a treaty before there is a further increase in the number of nuclear powers.

At the same time, the officials said, the Chinese test would only contribute to the reluctance of such countries as India and Japan to sign a treaty renouncing the right to develop atomic weapons.

Although the Chinese test came amid talk of a possible meeting between Premier Alexsei Kosygin and President Johnson, its possible effects on such a meeting were largely a matter of conjecture among American officials.

The test, it was believed, might increase the desire of the two leaders to make concessions, permitting a rapid agreement on a treaty to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. The two sides are now divided on the inspection requirements.